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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0070
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0006
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 6008
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 7253
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0448
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0630
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 0033
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 0036
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0182
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0153
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 7763
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 5863
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BRASILIA 000304

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA AND WHA/BSC

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SUBJECT: BRAZIL: IRAN, ARAB WORLD, ON AMORIM'S MIND IN 2008

REF: A. A. BRASILIA 002132

[1](#)B. B. BRASILIA 001278

[1](#)C. C. BRASILIA 001252

[1](#)D. D. BRASILIA 001230

[1](#)E. E. BRASILIA 001231

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION PHIL CHICOLA FOR REASONS 1.4 B A
ND D

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim's recent visit to five Middle Eastern countries continues a renewed focus on the Middle East that began with Amorim's participation at the Annapolis meetings in November of last year. Since Annapolis, Foreign Ministry (Itamaraty) Middle East hands have missed no opportunity to reiterate their satisfaction with Brazil's participation in the conference and cite it as a good start to a year they expect to be full of energetic diplomatic activity in the region. As often in the past, during the trip Amorim did not miss an opportunity to take some shots at US policy in the Middle East, criticizing the US and the West's efforts to isolate "parties" to the peace process, such as Hizballah and HAMAS. Considering the multiple platforms Brazilian officials will share with Arab leaders this year and Brazil's tendency to cater to perceived Arab grievances, such criticism is likely to turn into a running feature throughout the year. Nevertheless, Itamaraty officials emphasize that their priority is to remain a credible interlocutor and a viable participant in any peace process, and that they have been and will continue to be critical of both sides when necessary. End Summary.

Amorim in the Middle East

¶2. (C) Following on what is widely seen within Itamaraty as Brazil's successful participation at the Annapolis meetings in November, Amorim went on a tour of the Middle East, which included stops in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and United Arab Emirates, to follow up on its engagement at Annapolis and to set up Brazil's Middle East agenda for 2008. Minister Rodrigo do Amaral of Itamaraty's Middle East Division I told poloff the trip helped consolidate Brazil's role as a player in the Middle East peace process and also advanced Brazil's trade agenda. Amaral repeated a line heard from Amorim in the press, that Brazil's role in the peace process was to be part of the chorus in a Greek play, standing outside the main action, but clarifying and criticizing when necessary.

¶3. (C) Although not the central focus, trade accounted for a significant component of Amorim's trip, according to Amaral. Middle Eastern countries represent one of the fastest growing regions, percentage-wise, for Brazilian exports. Since Lula took office, these have grown by almost 130% (from US\$2.8 billion in 2003 to US\$6.4 billion in 2008), with Brazil running a US\$3.1 billion surplus with the region. Amaral noted that they were pleased with how quickly they were able to work out the Israel-Mercosul trade deal and have hopes to sign further trade deals this year. News reports also indicate that, in addition to a potential Lula visit to the region, several Brazilian governors, including Aécio Neves of Minas Gerais and Sergio Cabral of Rio de Janeiro, are planning trade-related visits to the Middle East.

BRASILIA 00000304 002 OF 004

¶4. (C) Asked to comment on Amorim's statements criticizing U.S.-imposed isolation of Syria and signaling that Hizballah and HAMAS needed to be part of any peace process, Amaral indicated that it was Itamaraty's view that President Asad is signaling openness to the West by taking steps to secure its border with Iraq and taking other measures, although he declined to provide specifics. For Brazil, Amaral added, Syria represented a complicated problem policy-wise due to the strong influence of the large Syrian community in Brazil, which was partially counterbalanced by the anti-Syrian elements of the Lebanese community. With regards to inclusion of Hizballah and HAMAS in a peace process, Amaral claimed that Amorim was not necessarily referring to inclusion of these groups in international peace efforts, but peace efforts within their own countries. He further reiterated Brazil's longstanding view that it does not condone the most extreme actions of those organizations, but that they are the legitimate representatives of substantial portions of the public in their respective countries and cannot be brushed aside.

Next Up: Iran Talks

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting with Itamaraty's Middle East Division II, which handles the Persian Gulf states, Secretario Carlos Gonçalves de Oliveira discussed next steps

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in the bilateral agenda with Iran. In the first week of March, Itamaraty will host vice-ministerial level political talks with Iranian officials. Secretario Gonçalves indicated that these are necessary to balance Brazil's high-level engagement with the Arab countries. When pressed for specifics on the bilateral talks, Gonçalves demurred and sought to downplay their significance. At the same time, he stressed that Iran is the largest importer of Brazilian goods in the Middle East, accounting for more than 35% of Brazilian exports to the region. As a result of what he claimed was a failure to open up Western markets due to the unfinished Doha round, Brazil is forced to find alternative markets and the Middle East represents an increasingly important one for

them.

¶6. (C) Goncalves did note that Itamaraty expects the Iranian delegation to press for more political and economic engagement on Brazil's part, as it is a source of resentment for Tehran that Brazil does not reciprocate the ministerial level visits made 3 to 4 times a year by Iranian officials. In addition, Itamaraty expects a push by the Iranian delegation for a meeting between Lula and Ahmadinejad, although Goncalves stressed that he thought it was highly unlikely to take place this year. In a separate meeting, Minister Rodrigo do Amaral confided that they were trying to stall such an encounter but that sooner or later they would run out of pretexts and a meeting would become inevitable. (Comment: according to ref A, presidential advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia has been supportive of such an encounter, while it remains unclear if Amorim favors it. End comment.)

¶7. (C) Turning the topic to Iran's growing interest in Latin America, Goncalves stressed Brazil remains unconcerned. "Bolivia has nothing to offer Iran, commercially or politically", Goncalves stated, and with regards to Venezuela added, "we see the growing alliance with Venezuela, but there is no substance to it". On Iran, he further added that Brazil believed that Ahmadinejad was similar to Chavez in

BRASILIA 00000304 003 OF 004

that both were more bluster than anything. He added that it was Brazil's view that an easing of pressure on Iran would actually give space for the regime to open up. The more the nuclear program is attacked, the more support for the regime hardens, and the easier it is to crack down on dissidence, he added. When pressed for what, if anything, Brazil would tell the Iranians during their bilateral talks regarding UNSC and IAEA demands for compliance, Goncalves added that Brazil would, as always, urge Iran to be transparent and accountable while defending their right to have a peaceful nuclear energy program.

Year of the Middle East

¶8. (C) Minister Amaral spoke at length to poloff about Brazil's expected agenda for the year following Amorim's trip and the bilateral talks with Iran. On deck for this year, according to Amaral: the late February Arab-South American foreign ministers' meeting in Buenos Aires; likely state visits by Syrian president Asad and the King of Jordan; a probable trip to the Middle East by President Lula; opening of new embassies in Oman and Qatar; potential trade accords with Egypt, Jordan and Morocco and the hope of finishing the long-delayed trade accord with the Gulf Cooperation Council; possible Brazilian participation at the Arab League summit; and capping off the year, the Arab-South American Summit in Qatar. Asked if Israel would be included in a potential Lula Middle East visit--a first of any Brazilian head-of state--Amaral stated that it was a priority. Right now, according to Amaral, Israel, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia were shaping up as the countries likely to be visited. Amaral also indicated that Itamaraty intended to follow up on Lula's August 2007 letter to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas offering to form a Friends of Peace group with other interested countries, such as those in IBSA (India and South Africa), to seek further engagement in the peace process.

Comment:

¶9. (C) After Brazil's bumbling performance during the inaugural Arab-South American Summit in 2005 (refs B through E), Itamaraty is once again ramping up its Middle East diplomacy. Itamaraty's Middle East personnel, although visibly overworked, are clearly enthusiastic about the growth

stock that is the Middle East agenda once again and they are making no bones about the possibilities it will offer for advancing Brazil's prestige and global ambitions. Although Brazil often tilts uncomfortably towards the anti-US view of things in the Middle East (e.g. Amorim's recent criticisms of the U.S.) and engages in more wishful thinking than is warranted (e.g. Lula's assertion last year that Iran's nuclear program was not in violation of any international accord), they might be evincing some understanding that visible signals of evenhandedness are critical to remain a credible player. Avoiding a presidential-level meeting between Ahmadinejad and Lula, at least in the near term, and undertaking a presidential visit to Israel in his third Middle East jaunt could be positive signals that Brazil understands its responsibility as a self-proclaimed neutral player in Mideast peace talks. Whether that is truly the case, a year packed with Middle East-related activity should

BRASILIA 00000304 004 OF 004

give us a clearer view. End Comment.

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